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FOREWORD

The following caustic portrait, burnt in with acid, with corrosive sublimate, is taken from the advance sheets of ARMAGEDDON, an orchestral drama of physical, spiritual, and political evolution, to be published in London next fall. The author is Leonard Van Noppen.

Bashti-Beki, whether so intended or not, will be found by some to fit the career of a prominent American politician and publicist. Few will fail to recognize the portrait.

Bashti-Beki is, however, only one of a vast gallery of portraits, comprising men of great prominence in business and in politics, both here and abroad.

The play is one of intrigue. It has a vivid plot, and several hundred characters. It pictures the modern Philistines in ancient Philistia. It runs the gamut of the emotions, depicts the battle of the strong and the weak; and, for the first time in literature, in the antithesis of the Eternal Mother and the Eternal Courtesan, it pictures the New Woman in a remarkable impersonation of militant motherhood.

The poetry, according to the nature of the characters, ranges from the commonplace to the sublime. In the intermezzoes, for orchestration, all the ages of civilization are represented, other portions burst into lyrical expression. The scenes are laid in Heaven, in Hell, and on the Earth. Lucifer and Mammon are

two of the chief characters; others are Michael and the Archangels, and certain personages known to fable and legend, who are but transparent masks for modern characters. Only part of the portrait is here given; the passages are taken at random, though the best is omitted, as the story can here be only suggested. (The name of the hero and of one of the heroines is reserved for the book.)

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by
E. Elliott

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All orders should be sent to
Brown-Morrison Co., Printers, Lynchburg, Va.

All advance orders for Armageddon, a book of more than 500 pages, will be registered by Brown-Morrison Co.

From the advance sheets of Armageddon

HERO: Bashti-Beki, ha!
That blusterer of loud loquacity?
What will he do?

1ST SOLDIER: He promises to lead
The people against their tyrants.

HERO: Ha! ha! ha!

3D SOLDIER: The toilers of all lands, both near and far,
And of the farthest provinces, espouse
His shining banner.

HERO: Ha! what can he do?
An eagle to his own profit, to their rights
He is a very mole. What will he do?

2D SOLDIER: He says he labors for the people's cause.

HERO: Labors? Ha! ha! He never labored, save
Under the strange delusion of his worth.
Was it not he who from the jungle came,
Splashed with himself? Who stood before the Sphinx,
Thinking to dwarf that giantess, the while,
Facing colossal littleness, she laughed,
Conscious of only vacancy? Oh, he,
The groaning people's heaviness will take
But lightly upon him. Lions are his words,
But all his deeds are mice; his promises
A shoal of blowing porpoises, no more.

1ST SOLDIER: He is reputed valiant and brave.

HERO: The coward hides in him, ready to fly.
What can he do? who is the architect

Of nothing but a frame of mind? Ha! ha!
Valour grows fat when he dines on his deeds.
His vanity fasts only when he sleeps.

2D SOLDIER: He thinks himself a prophet, and assumes
To be the people's voice.

HERO: I know that he
Can oracle like any owl, and that
He blunders, as by accident, at times
Into the realms of reason; but he toils
Only to build himself a pedestal,
To tower his nothingness before the world.

3D SOLDIER: Yet can talk humbly.

HERO: True, his modesty
Is but the horse he rides to show him off.
But never think that this prodigious boaster,
This satyr, butting through the common herd,
Pities the poor. Was it not he who gave
The counsel of content to Egypt's thralls?
I know him well, too well, and all his kind.

1ST SOLDIER: In secret he is allied with the kings.

In the next scene the Hebrews invoke the aid of the Hero, complaining of their hard lot under the Philistines.

HERO: And have ye then no champion?

1ST HEBREW: Yes, one.
Whom many follow, Bashti-Beki, he.

HERO: Ha! Bashti-Beki, that abortion, who
Foaled of a night-mare, stabled in a dream,
Deludes the world with his omniscience, Ha!
That Peace in armour, with his vizor down
And shield upraised, provoking the attack.
That maker of postures and tongue-hero, that
Prodigious vaunter, who invokes the peace
To provoke war! Ha!

1ST HEBREW: The very same.

HERO: That dead sun lighted by his satellites. Ha! Ha!
That opportunist, like a parrot, perched
Upon the finger of chance, where he repeats
The echo of the time. Ha! Ha!

2D HEBREW: The same.

HERO: And do they follow him, this mountebank,
Itinerant statesman, and perpetual pageant?
This hero, cut to the measure? This rantipole,
And vain hysteric, roaring to and fro,
Exhorting all to look on him and live?
This brazen serpent?

1ST HEBREW: It is said that he
Will at the time of the Passover present
Himself before the people.

HERO: Ha! ha! ha!

3D HEBREW: He is most popular.

HERO: Incredible!
This ring in the nose of the populace, who stands
On all fours with the people, and whose bray
Sounds like an Assyrian edict! Doth he still
Flaunt his red flag of modesty and coin
A mint of shining virtues, whereupon
His ramping image counterfeits the truth?

2D HEBREW: They still believe him worthy of belief.

HERO: This blusterer, bloated with self, who towers
Only by pigmies; who, most positive,
Is never certain; this Astonishment,
Whose look is a pronouncement, as if to say;
"I am infallible," and doth he still
As in a spasm of per-fervid virtue,
Deny his deeds, though proved unto the hilt?

And still pontificate before the world
As the one just and only honest man?

1ST HEBREW: Still doth he promise prodigies, but we,
Unlike the multitude, are not deceived.

HERO: Seeing his shadow once, by candle-light,
Loom on the wall, he reasoned he was great
To have so great a shadow. Ha! ha! ha!

3D HEBREW: He prates of justice, yet is grown so proud,
He scarce can brook his shadow by his side.

2D HEBREW: Duties he still prescribes—for others, he
Owes only one, his duty to himself.

1ST HEBREW: Of late, the money-lender, Egibi,
The builder of the Highway to the West,
Gave out a letter he received from him.
Therein with prate of practicalities.
And cant of wisdom and necessity,
"The only Honest Man," made compromise
With principle for fifty-thousand down.

3D HEBREW: Still he disowns his illegitimate deeds,
Fathered at night with opportunity.

HERO: Ha! ha! the leopard might as well attempt
To run away from his spots. Accused of truth,
His words stand up and prove an alibi.

1ST HEBREW: Subjected to much bitter harriment,
The letters and the shekels he denied
With such vociferations, and assumed
Such injured innocence, that half the world
Will still believe their idol was maligned.

2D HEBREW: He is the people's god.

3D HEBREW: Yet it was proved
That he and his abettors had received
Gold to mislead the people.

HERO: Yet for himself,
No doubt this jackal in the lion's skin,
This Hittite, whose rude sceptre is a stick,
This brazen-faced hierophant of brawn,
Received the lion's share?

3D HEBREW: He did not starve.

1ST HEBREW: And then, to prove his honesty, he feigned
A righteous rage, assumed, so all could see,
A most accusing manner; without ruth
Deflowered fair names, tore reputations down,
And as upon a promontory stood
And from that outlook thundered at the world.

2D HEBREW: Soldiers and citizens, both low and high,
He in his rabid virtue, then assailed;
With mud he sought to soil them, while he flung
The lie into the very face of truth.

HERO: And still the people follow him, this voice
Crying forever, in the wilderness,
Of one to come, himself?

3D HEBREW: They still believe,

1ST HEBREW: At least, so do the ignorant, and such
Alas! are multitudes.

2D HEBREW: And though he lends
His ear to their complaints, affects good will,
And feigns the virtues popular, proclaiming,
Yea, in the market-place, to all the poor,
And all the disinherited, that he,
The people's champion, will right their wrongs,
And re-establish justice, yet he spent
Out of the revenues, wrung from our hearts,
Enormous sums for pleasure.

3D HEBREW: When of late,
Companioned by his petty parasites,

He visited far countries, spending there
His plentitude of commonplace, and sowing
The wind with platitudes, no less than when,
To popularize his features, he went through
The highways and the by-ways of the land.
The people paid, not he, for that display
And joyful junketing, the people paid.

1ST HEBREW: I mind me too how, when the East and West
Were joined in deadly conflict, he proposed
Himself as arbiter.

2D HEBREW: And so became.

HERO: So is become a man of peace. His reasons,
Like crabs, go every way at once.

1ST HEBREW: Indeed,

2D HEBREW: Upon the roaring billows of loud war,
Much oil he poured.

HERO: Then afterwards, no doubt,
With fiery breath he set the oil aflame.

1ST HEBREW: Even so.

HERO: I know the man. Before him goes
A roar of acclamations like a sea;
Behind him praise is gulped in a vast yawn
Like a prayer for swift relief.

3D HEBREW: For this we pray.
His plausible bluntness looks so like the truth,
That his asseverations are believed.

HERO: I tell you truly, if for nothing more,
That man should die to lessen ignorance.

2D HEBREW: Of late he wrote a book.

HERO: Another one?
I know the subject. I have read the others,
And every one a capital offence.

Vehement, voluble, that pulpiteer
Speaks volumes to say nothing. Ha! ha! ha!
How shall posterity forgive him, who
Courts posthumous honesty, I fear, in vain?

3D HEBREW: The world will find him out.

HERO: And then will know nothing.

2D HEBREW: May it be soon.

HERO: Yet hath he skill
To play upon the people as on a flute,
Making the hollowness of empty minds
To sound his praises.

3D HEBREW: 'Tis a popular tune.

HERO: In his discourse, as in a copious stream,
A minnow of thought becomes a whale of sound.
How bold he was, how very bold, when he,
Plotting for replications of applause,
Pelted the dead with epithets! Oh bold,
This militant Pen and stylus without a style,
Whose pompous name goes strutting through a book.

1ST HEBREW: Oh, verily the kings have chosen well;
Is he not called the captain of the hosts?
The Dictator of Philistia?

HERO: Ha! ha! ha!
Is he so mighty then, this blusterer?
This swaggering braggart, with a tongue of brass?

3D HEBREW: All fear him.

2D HEBREW: For he wields a perilous power.

1ST HEBREW: Those that still trust him think that he intends
A sudden blow to win our freedom.

3D HEBREW: Others
Think he is plotting to usurp the throne.

HERO: Oh trust him not. The man is drunk with self,
And will to others offer but the dregs.

The Hero is then told of Bashti-Beki's theft of the Ark of the Covenant, which seems here the symbol of the American Constitution. He also has stolen the shew-bread, and broken the tables of stone.

In a following scene the Devil, now known as the Man with the Golden Mask, visits the heroine and prompts her to use Bashti-Beki as a pawn to win the throne of Philistia.

GOLD MASK: Does not the Hittite Bashti-Beki?
HEROINE: Well?
GOLD MASK: Dance at your bidding like a well-tamed bear?
HEROINE: He loves to think himself in love, and oft
Puts on a sentimental tenderness;
But is in love with his infirmity.
GOLD MASK: Which is?
HEROINE: Himself.
GOLD MASK: I see you know him.
HEROINE: Know him?
That hero to the groundlings, always dull—
GOLD MASK: Yet is his dullness to the point; for he
Doth bear his honors as if he hoped for more,
And can be used.
HEROINE: That joyless one dejects me.
And I do scorn to angle for such a fish.
GOLD MASK: Yet many think that you coquet with him.
HEROINE: 'Tis true that I, of late, have played with him,
But only for amusement, Ha! ha! ha!
GOLD MASK: To see his antics is diverting.
HEROINE: Yet
I weary of this performing seal, with his

Flamboyant modesty, that only dives
To bob up unexpectedly, and so
Surprises the beholder into applause.
This Prince of Peradventure, who puts on
Superior airs to hide inferior aims.

GOLD MASK: You think so? Ha!

HEROINE: A demagogue, who rides,
Without relays, his policies to death!
A pulpiteer! A sermonizing knave!
A boaster, a puff-ball! who, at will, assumes
A virtuous indignation when it pays.
Ha! ha! we mix like oil and water.

GOLD MASK: Yet
Is he not modest?

HEROINE: When he does not boast
He boasts he could boast if he only would.

GOLD MASK: You must admit he's brave.

HEROINE: Ha! all men know
When he is in the perilous front of war,
That he is there by accident, or because
He was attacked in the rear.

GOLD MASK: Then why not be
His prompter, and play the prologue to his end?
So he act vanity, the puppet, till
This Sir Pomposo, with tragedian tread,
Shall strut his strength away.

HEROINE: I doubt
The wisdom of this policy, for I
Have pared his soul to the quick and found it dead.
He pays the vicious when they furnish him
Occasions to seem virtuous, and is
So over-strenuous he strains at ease.

GOLD MASK: You use the scalpel like a surgeon born,

HEROINE: Thirsting for praise, he hides his virtues only
Where they are sure to be found. Upon his face
Beauty dies hard, and every time he laughs
He invents another pain. How use this bungler,
This charlatan and swaggering martialist,
This tadpole of the puddle, grown a toad,
Throned on the toadstool of his own conceit?

GOLD MASK: He leads the royal armies, and aspires
To be Dictator—

HEROINE: Yes?

GOLD MASK: Is drunken too
With the imperial I—

HEROINE: It does seem strange
That he speaks never with the royal we,
But with an absolute, autocratic I.

GOLD MASK: It is most singular, and this, I think,
Means that he is ambitious.

HEROINE: That is plain.

GOLD MASK: Not merely so for Gaza and her crown,
But for the rulership of the whole realm.

HEROINE: 'Tis possible.

GOLD MASK: Most probable.

HEROINE: And so?

GOLD MASK: Make him the architect to rear your throne,
Your pliant tool, the wedge to cleave in twain
Philistia's rotting empire.

HEROINE: What, with him,
That crude straight speaker from a crooked heart?

GOLD MASK: His forth-right crookedness will make for you
An easement to the throne.

HEROINE: That make-shift, who,
Plotting himself, got famous by mistake,
And took it seriously.

GOLD MASK: So profiting
By his mistakes, he kept on making them,
And so will he continue until the end,
Till of his labors we shall reap the fruit,
The crown we covet, you and I.

HEROINE: While he

GOLD MASK: Shall vanish into an echo, or else fade
Into an exclamation point.

HEROINE: Must I
Give up my pleasure for this Spectacle,
This National calamity, this rough
And ready tonguester, whose far-blown exploits
Were littered of a fatted opportunity?
Is there no other way?

GOLD MASK: No other way.

HEROINE: This battering-ram, who, most obstreperous,
Lowers his mind to elevate his head.
This vain unsecret babbler; who, in public
Practices secrecy, and to the world
Publishes his compunctions.

GOLD MASK: As you know,
He poses as an ornament, and so,
Postured for popular applauses, cocks
His ears for praise—

HEROINE: Though when beside himself
He can look modest.

GOLD MASK: So you must contrive
To flatter his hate of flattery.

HEROINE: I see.

GOLD MASK: Pretend to be the puppet of his will,
Suggest to him what he most longs to do,
Yet seem to be persuaded to the course
To which you shall persuade him. So shall he
Jump through the hoops that you hold up for him,
Like a trained dog.

HEROINE: I like it not, I say
He is impossible; as soon expect
The shell to keep the secret of the sea.
No! no! he is too weak.

GOLD MASK: Weak, very weak.
But strong enough to break a promise. Let
His weakness be your strength.

HEROINE: But how?

GOLD MASK: No doubt
He wearies of these milky times of peace.
Dish up a war, sauced with a little love,
But scant your kisses.

HEROINE: Love without the thrill.
And when I kiss I will reserve my heart.
That suits me better. His Hurly Burly air
Is little to my taste.

GOLD MASK: And as he snaps
At opportunities, as toads at flies,
He will go willingly to any goal,
Which hath himself for end.

HEROINE: I see a light.

GOLD MASK: Ignore him, and he stifles.

HEROINE: True, for he,
Should one but speak of others, always veers
The praise back to himself, till he is deaf
With his own name.

GOLD MASK: Though his corrupted heart
Is barked with honest ruggedness, we know
That for self-profit he will soon suspend
His honesty.

HEROINE: That is?

GOLD MASK: If wrongs are done,
If done but secretly, he will approve,
So he enjoy the profit, unaccused.

HEROINE: And so, to keep suspicion from our plot,
Like the sly hen, that cackles beyond her nest,
He'll clamour the loudest, when he hatches lies,
Of truth and righteousness.

GOLD MASK: So from his own
To others' vices will divert the world
Blurting the lie as if it were the truth.

HEROINE: We'll let him fulminate his fustian thought,
This brawler, this time-pleaser, who succeeds
By his defects; this circulating conscience,
Never at home when called upon.

GOLD MASK: So we
Shall lash his weakness till it simulates
A valiant virility.

HEROINE: And have
Him roar for us.

GOLD MASK: Humour his royal hopes,
Flatter his bristles to a sleek content—

HEROINE: And let him play the hero at his will.

GOLD MASK: But trust him not.

HEROINE: No! No!

GOLD MASK: By all accounts
Never accused of accuracy, he needs
Our constant watching.

HEROINE: Ha! ha! he does, indeed.

GOLD MASK: With artful praise and grossest flatteries,
Fatten this person to a personage,
Then we'll dispose of him, as men discharge
Their consciences, for being too faithful.

HEROINE: Ha!
Trust me for that.

GOLD MASK: I will, and though his brow
Bulges as it would burst with utterless thought,
And though he looks so wise before he speaks,
I'm sure you can hoodwink him to the end.

HEROINE: I'll send my features for awhile to school,
And dress my craft in smiles. He'll not suspect.
I'll race his mind with a snail, and when they run,
I'll wager on the snail.

GOLD MASK: And while we plot,
We'll let this ass chew the thistle of content.
He must not smell suspicion.

HEROINE: Meanwhile, shall
The orchestration of his attitudes
From our dissembled plots divert the world?

GOLD MASK: Let him believe that you believe in him,
And then he will believe you.

HEROINE: Doubtless, while
His ambling mind will, like the lumbering thunder,
Labor behind the lightning of our wit.

GOLD MASK: And when we stand triumphant at the goal,
We'll stretch the skin of that dead ass.

HEROINE: For what?

GOLD MASK: To drum on.

HEROINE: For that purpose he will do
As well alive, since he is, as you know,
A rattle-brain.

GOLD MASK: You prove your point, ha! ha!
By a dull example.

HEROINE: True.

GOLD MASK: Let us take care
Not to be swayed by prejudice.

HEROINE: No! no!

GOLD MASK: He has no doubt some noble qualities,
Of which of late he gave us living proof.
Did he not say that for the common weal
He'd give up ease and fortune?

HEROINE: Everything.

GOLD MASK: Would even, should necessity require,
Shoulder the government alone?

HEROINE: Poor man!

GOLD MASK: Would, should the people call him to high place,
Come forth from his retirement.

HEROINE: So he said.

GOLD MASK: To prove himself the patriot, I believe
That he would sacrifice—

HEROINE: His dearest friend.
As for a reputation, he would sacrifice
His character, if he had such to lose—

GOLD MASK: I think he will be safe with you.

HEROINE: So safe,
I shall fall dead for laughing to behold him
Balance the world upon his thumb, the while
He loses his own footing.

GOLD MASK: If you laugh,
Laugh not too loudly; though we see this toad

Dilating his dimensions, let our mirth
Be secret and judicious.

HEROINE: Yet with him
There is no danger. You will see that sponge
Drink up a sea of flattery.

GOLD MASK: Go slow.

Having sounded the heroine as to her feelings towards Bashti-Beki, and obtained from her a promise to employ him as an instrument to obtain the throne of Philistia, Gold Mask, or Mammon, now persuades her to use another, called El-Attick, one as oily and astute as Bashti-Beki is blunt and dull, as a foil to the dullness of the Hittite. Omitting the scene of the Heroine with Bashti-Beki, which shows the psychology of the latter, and paints his portrait in the colors of life, we quote part of the Heroine's conversation with El-Attick, whom it is her policy to set against Bashti-Beki.

HEROINE: I know your subtlety, which makes me sure,
Yet one there is, a rival, who aspires
To reach the self-same goal.

EL-ATTICK: Who?

HEROINE: Bashti-Beki.

EL-ATTICK: That irrepressible! that bubbling geyser,
Spouting spontaneous dullness—Ha! ha! ha!
That over-topping arrogance, who thinks
He masquerades in modesty, and feigns
To affect his bluntness, fearing that the world
Might think it natural.

HEROINE: Which he suspects.

EL-ATTICK: What, he?

HEROINE: Even he, the only honest man.

EL-ATTICK: That epithet clings to him like a burr.

HEROINE: It is his epitaph.

EL-ATTICK: He'll find it hard
To live up to his epitaph. Ha! ha!
And should have chosen a modest one, instead.

HEROINE: Yet many do believe him, since they think
He is of truth the very buttress.

EL-ATTICK: Ha!
The flying buttress.

HEROINE: Are you not too hard?

EL-ATTICK: Ha! ha! so he aspires to Gaza's throne,
This public-crier in motley, with his foot
Upon the pedal of organized applause?

HEROINE: Even he, and thinks that he is sure to win.

EL-ATTICK: Yet at the moment when he faces me
Shall his momentum come to sudden stop.

HEROINE: That must you prove.

EL-ATTICK: And so I shall, ha! ha!
That pestilent vow-maker, who lays down
The law of his uprightness, and who gives
Judgment before he thinks.

HEROINE: And when he thinks
Proves only lack of judgment.

EL-ATTICK: Does he not
Furnish the nation every other day
A calendar of precepts?

HEROINE: Yet it finds
In others its examples.

EL-ATTICK: Wonderful!
That he shines least when he reflects most.

HEROINE: Yet,
They say few dare to face him.

EL-ATTICK: Ha! ha! ha!
Facing his face, his very mirror cracked
Itself with laughing. He it was who brayed—

His trump the marrowless bone of a dead ass—
So that the land, as with an earthquake shook.

HEROINE: He thinks himself a lion.

EL-ATTICK: Lion! Bah!
This wart upon the nose of war, this wrangler,
Commanding order for disorder's sake!
His flaming oriflamme, plucked from a goose,
All follow to the fore-front of the rear.

HEROINE: A running commentary. Thus, when he
Shows the white feather, do his followers
Show their heels.

EL-ATTICK: Let him threaten. Expectation
Grew lean when he began to do. Ha! ha!
Peace follows in his wake, and like an imp
Sticks out its tongue.

HEROINE: Yet is he versatile,
Equally dull in all he touches, keen
In all he lets alone.

EL-ATTICK: Save us! when
He calls a man a liar, or a fool,
He thinks he stabs him with an epigram.

HEROINE: He spares himself no pleasure, us, no pains,
And though he goes, pied in the checks of change,
Yet in one thing he surely is consistent:
He always is what he was born, a fool,
Clearly himself for all his cloudy ways.

EL-ATTICK: Making his virtues his incontinence,
He grafts his name on popular applause,
And well he knows—who better in the land?
How he, for his advantage, with a lie
Can modulate his duty.

HEROINE: On the spur

Of the moment, where the world must see, he stands,
Posing before the multitude.

EL-ATTICK: Already
Are they grown weary of his posturings.
This epidemic of the obvious,
This superficializing Pleonast,
Who when he finds his tongue, proves nothing, save
That he has lost his head.

HEROINE: His swelling words
Prove that his speech is hollow; yet who else
Has made of dullness a fine art?

EL-ATTICK: And though
He but repeats himself, and so says nothing,
Still will this Mumbo-Jumbo in the mart,
Or on the rostrum, find in his own life
The dear occasion of an orator.
And while he mouths his large magniloquence,
A scribe takes down as sacred every word.

HEROINE: Ha! ha! most sacred, when he is profane,
The people swallow him with a grimace.
Sure, an emetic.

EL-ATTICK: When they throw him up,
They'll feel relieved. As unoriginal
As fluent, this misguiding publicist
Now dons canonicals and preaches peace;
Now bounds into the arena, where he glares,
Posed, like a gladiator, for applause.

HEROINE: Yes, everywhere the rabble whoops for him.
He says he hates these milky times of peace.

EL-ATTICK: Yet his incessant goings up and down
Churns them to butter for his bread.

HEROINE: When he
Smiles, he reveals the felon in his face.

EL-ATTICK: That face is verily of all our commerce
The most important staple. Could we but
Export his features to the shores of hell!

HEROINE: This must we do, so they will not return.
But since they are so heavy, we must beware
Lest we sink with them on the way.

EL-ATTICK: You make
Too much of him, this controversialist!
This bastard son of Destiny! whose speech,
Weighted with lightness, like a comet, burns
Because it is but gas.

HEROINE: I wonder—

EL-ATTICK: Need
We loose a catapult to kill a fly?

HEROINE: Of him think not too lightly, so prepare
Your utmost, and whatso the kings propose
To frustrate his ambition, known to all,
We, you and I, will to ourselves divert
As measures for our safety.

EL-ATTICK: Well conceived,
And though he bristles into bravery,
And counterfeits fierce courage with his teeth,
Setting the time on edge, and though he roars,
As if his looks to lions went to school,
I have of him no fear. Since he essays
To exorcise the age of evil; he
Should sacrifice his own superfluous life.

HEROINE: You ask too much, this you and I must do,
Strike when I give the word, but not before,
Strike not haphazardly.

EL-ATTICK: I shall await
The signal like an executioner,

And when I flash his head off with one stroke,
The Age shall lose its tail.

HEROINE: And with its tail
Lose its distemper.

EL-ATTICK: Like a curtailed hound.

HEROINE: And yet the man is plausible, the kings,
Also that coalition of great lords,
Fear him; for he is strangely popular.

EL-ATTICK: Yes, strangely so, yet is it strange? For he
Can wag his pate in a wise way, and has
Attacks of virtue in public.

HEROINE: Thus he seems
The people's paragon.

EL-ATTICK: Yet be assured
Although he prates of justice, and harangues
With violent, loud volubility,
That the "square deal" comes round to him at last.

HEROINE: He trims the edges till it fits his need.

EL-ATTICK: He but mistakes his loss of memory
For a clear conscience. When he blusters "liar!"
He proves his enemy has told the truth.

HEROINE: Soon, soon, no doubt, we shall know all his plans.

EL-ATTICK: He will, as heretofore, undress his mind,
Windowed to all the world, then, turning, do
Homage to his own honesty, the while,
To see his politic frankness, all applaud.

HEROINE: His plans nest high, and when they are full-fledged,
We'll shake the tree and spill them.

EL-ATTICK: And we shall have
An omelette of feathers.

HEROINE: For all his bluff
And honest heartiness, he sends his looks
In secret, as apprentices to pride.

EL-ATTICK: And when, of late, he swaggered through the land
With the courage of convictions not his own,
Prigged with false learning, pranked with promises;
The stork his heraldry, the Patriarch
Of a diatribe of attributes, of which
He stood the unblushing father; as he sold
His virtues like commodities, and moved
With more of arrogance than suits a god,
And parodied his Maker, I remarked:
No wonder God is grown unpopular,
Since this man tells us Deity was made
In his own image.

HEROINE: Always when he speaks,
His sallies of dullness leave me in a drowse.

EL-ATTICK: And when he would be light, his levity
Flounders, a porpoise, in the shallows of sense.

HEROINE: Flounders, but never floats.

EL-ATTICK: And when he laughs,
It seems as if he tries to celebrate,
Successful cerebration, though of this
I have my doubts.

HEROINE: Not he, ha! ha!
Know he is breathless, if he says not "I."
He says he loves me.

EL-ATTICK: Ha! when out of breath?
And you believe he loves you?

HEROINE: His loud praise
Makes me in love with silence. How I loathe

His lumpish loutings! Always he affects
The pose heroic—

EL-ATTICK: Ha! ha! say imposes.
He bulges into importance like a toad,
Till some believe his bluster is what it seems.
For all his vauntery, not soon his deeds
Of courage shall convict this blusterer.
Of him I have no fear.

HEROINE: I wait the proof.
Like heated glass, I'll mould him with my breath,
And shape him to our purpose.

EL-ATTICK: Tease to roars
The whole menagerie of his convictions,
Till he is deaf with his own righteousness,
So we can plot his overthrow.

The next scene in this play of intrigue is between the Heroine and the High Priest, whom she inveigles into the plot.

EL-TAUIN (The High Priest): Need we fear the King?

HEROINE: No! no! no harm in him.
But I do fear—

EL-TAUIN: Whom?

HEROINE: One less circumspect.
Too over-zealous.

EL-TAUIN: Bashti-Beki?

HEROINE: Yes.

EL-TAUIN: So he is snared?

HEROINE: Ha! ha! yes, in the trap.

EL-TAUIN: Curb him, or we are lost.

HEROINE: He only knows
What he must do.

EL-TAUIN: I fear he knows too much.

HEROINE: Yet knew he less we scarcely could succeed.

EL-TAUIN: His devious virtues, dangerous as vices,
And his abruptness and precipitate speech,
May cost us dear.

HEROINE: Fear not, his deeds are marked.
Of us he can say little, only blurt
His honest ignorance. I only fear
That he will do too much.

EL-TAUIN: Let him not strike
Until the chosen hour.

HEROINE: If I so long
Can keep his muleship stabled; now and then,
Disquieted with quiet, with his hoofs
He stamps so restively within his stall,
I fear he wakes suspicion from its sleep.

EL-TAUIN: We must cast down this upstart without fail.

HEROINE: Hope is a horse he rides to death, we'll lash
It over a precipice. This is the plan:
As soon as he is seated on the throne,
He'll lose both love and immortality;
For I, myself, shall give the fatal cup,
Which of his presence shall relieve the world.

EL-TAUIN: A queen of poisons! Make the potion sure.
I never liked him, he is all deceit,
Wrapped in himself—

HEROINE: Ha! nothing in that package.
All that is in it shows on the outside.

EL-TAUIN: You weigh him lightly.

HEROINE: Yet I find him heavy
With what he lacks.

EL-TAUIN: Some say he's Gaza's master.

HEROINE: Master of nothing. No, I'll take that back,
For he is master in that art of arts
They call design; for who as well as he
Can draw a crowd?

EL-TAUIN: This no one can dispute.

HEROINE: With every tone he proves his heart is hollow;
With every word, that he is void of thought.

EL-TAUIN: Give time the sharp emetic of his deeds,
So it vomit his black memory, for else
His name, embalmed in legend, will become
The ear-ache of the ages.

HEROINE: When that name
Which like a thunder roared around the world,
Follows him to the Styx, it will drop dead
Of sheer heart failure on the very brink,
And rot unspoken.

EL-TAUIN: This will be his end.

The next scene is the Heroine with her maidens, who tease her with her many lovers.

AMILLAM: Who is the favorite? Who is it now,
El-Attick, Bashti-Beki, or the Priest?

HEROINE: The Hittite or the Hebrew? Ha! ha! ha!
Those counter-irritants, correctives, poisons,
That antidote each other.

SADDASU: Is not Bashti
The man of Destiny?

HEROINE: His own, not mine.
Screaming success, is his, no doubt. It is
Also the peacock's, as it swells with pride
When pompously it struts before the world,
Spreading the wonder of its tail, and screams
Its head off, all for lack of brains. Ha! ha!

WAVANI: The whole world speaks of him.

HEROINE: Believe me, this
Burly ebullient soon will bubble to air,
And leave no echo of his bluster, save
A buzz in the ear of time.

NOROMO: All men admit
Himself is his sole burden.

HEROINE: Would to God
It were also his refrain. With loud guffaws,
Flashing his teeth, as if he found a brother,
He claps the world upon the back, and takes
Into his confidence his father's god.

BELTANI: He thinks, indeed, 'twas he invented truth.

HEROINE: Deny him, and he calls you atheist.
When he aids others, it is to help himself;
When he is witty, it is because his mind
Has a relapse; when he is reverent,
You know he bows in secret to himself.

KAS-BEYA: Why do you hate him?

HEROINE: Why? I hate him, hate
This overweening wrangler, bellicose
With cowards, meek among the brave. I hate
This would-be-great, mock-valiant posturer,

Immune to ridicule as he cavorts
For popular applause; I hate this dull
And voluble monotony, this quack,
Whose wet-nurse was a duck; who, in the mud
Waddles to cry his nostrums, and affects
All things save baseness; this burlesquing mole,
Who feigns to be a seer; this prancing bear,
And stilting modesty, who reckless spends
A language to say nothing; hate this blaring,
Stentorian mouth-piece of a bladder burst,
This bulbous face, whose back-bone is his nose—
I hate him—ha! I hate him all the more
Because he loves me.

KAS-BEYA: I would hate him too.

HEROINE: His smile smells of corruption. Though he smiles,
Going and coming, day and night, yet I
Have seen his face blubbered with facile tears.
He can wax lachrymose when weeping pays.

AMILLAM: Yet many praise him.

HEROINE: True, and the renowners
That chronicle his littleness grow big,
While he diminishes into himself.
So eager is he to see his name, ha! ha!
Lying in state, that from the many samples,
Sent for approval, he, with infinite pains
Selected his own epitaph, which leaves
Nothing but truth to wish for.

WAVANI: And for this
He is not anxious.

HEROINE: No, he dreads the truth,
As cats fear water. Though this blinking toad
Ogles at opportunity, and though

With most portentous unimportance, he
Simulates greatness, so he may impress;
Yet will this bogey in perspective seem
The midget of the moment, nothing more.

ZILLAH: Some say his knowledge is enormous, some
That he fights with blunt weapons, as a wile
To hide his penetration.

HEROINE: Just as soon
Accuse of rare acumen the wild ass;
Of poetry, the hippopotamus.
Oh, he is subtle, since the veil he wears
Was fashioned by a blacksmith in a forge.

As for his knowledge, it is but too plain
Omniscience is his ignorance. Indeed,
Nothing that he begins but has at once
The accent of finality. He ends
Always where he began, in nothing. Ha!
And what he will not meddle with, God knows,
Though it is surely nothing under Heaven,
Nor on the earth, nor in the waters. I
Would quote him at his best, did I not fear
That you might say I lied.

EQUISIBEL: And yet the world
Esteems his worth so highly—

HEROINE: 'Tis, indeed,
Of the highest relative value, always he
Dons virtue as a vizor. Ha! ha! ha!
This antic who untunes the times, dilutes
All greatness with himself, infects the world
As with a fever of virtue, and so, ha! ha!
Purrs after each debauch of purity,
You'd think he hums a hymn, when he but sings
A pæan to himself.

SADDASU: You are severe.

HEROINE: Only because I tell the truth. Shall I
Echo the puffery that inflates this bladder,
Blown up from pigmy to gigantic, till,
Bloated to mountain size, he condescends
To patronize the Deity? Yet once,
Ha! he forgot himself.

ARDIA: And when was that?

HEROINE: When he was witty. You smile, but it is true.
I will be just.

THE MAIDENS: Ha! ha!

HEROINE: I heard him once
Put all his wisdom in one grain of wit,
Which left his reason bankrupt. To this day
He laughs at his own cleverness, and still
Keeps burnishing that solitary jest,
So that, no longer mournful, it laughs back
At its dull father, with a shining face.

AMILLAM: And yet he loves you?

HEROINE: Only because he
Imagines I am part of his career.
If he loves me, it proves he loves himself.
And how I love this briding yokel, this
Sir Hurly Burly, this Belligerent
Muscular Brawler of invertebrate brawn—
This self-succeeder! How I love, ha! ha!
Will soon appear. Oh, you shall hear thereof.

KARIMONA: Will you forego the bride-rights without tears?

HEROINE: One moment only let him monarchize,
Then see him faint into a ghost and fade
Into his native nothingness. Shall I
Beside that blusterer lie cheek by jowl?

Pah! garbage! Liefer would I die. I'll flee
This epileptic seizure ere his arms
Can clasp me. Watch, and you will see his soul
Shrivel into a louse; which, when he sees,
The Devil, whom the people call Old Scratch,
Will punish with the mad pursuit of Hell.

EQUISIBEL: Have pity on your affianced.

HEROINE: Now you know him
As I do. For your sake, not his, have I
Emptied my treasury of compliments.

The rest of the mighty deeds of that great Hero, Bashti-Beki, the would-be king of Philistia, are they not written in the chronicle called ARMAGEDDON?